Agape Fest Seminar

Conducted by Rich Mullins on May 11, 1996

> *This is a synopsis of the seminar Rich Mullins gave at the Agape Music Festival on May 11, 1996 in Greenville, IL. It is my best recollection of what transpired, and my apologies to Mr. Mullins if I misrepresent him in any way. The lengthiness of this article can be partially attributed to Rich Mullins' wordiness, and partially to my own. Rich entered from the back of the room to enthusiastic applause. He was wearing a black sweater (it was chilly) with a tan t-shirt underneath, and baggy denim shorts. He had white socks & brown shoes, and had a tan. He told those in the back of the room to come up front and sit on the floor if they liked, so they could hear better (no microphones).*
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> *He said he really didn't have a topic to speak about, so he'd make it a question and answer format. (The "official" topic in the program was "Music Ministry of Today.") He told us that he has an opinion about **everything** and that he sticks to his opinions whether or not he's right or has anything to back up his opinion. He also told us that if people take him too seriously, that's **their** fault. He told us that he's much less that who/what people think he is ... and much more as well. He said he'd go ahead and answer a few up front to save time. He grew up in Indiana, he doesn't know whether or not he's going to do another album, but that it's either that or get a real job.*
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> *He said he doesn't really enjoy singing that much, and he has a theory on that. He said little boys go to music class and the music teacher sings really high, and then they get older and their voice begins to change and does really weird things, so they never feel comfortable singing. But then he joked that apparently he dislikes singing less than he dislikes hard work, so he might as well keep at it.*
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> *The first question was something to the effect of: When did you first realize you were called into a music ministry? Rich elaborated for some time on this topic, went off on several related tangents, always came back to the subject at hand, but still covered a great deal of ground. I will attempt to cover as much of what he said as I can ... although I may not put it in the*

right place or remember all the questions that sparked the response.

First, the question seemed to annoy him some. (Rich was, in general, a little testy during the hour and a half he shared with us.) He told us that he thinks that we're all called to be who we are, and that we should all realize that we're called. Then he made a big point of the fact that he's not an evangelical and commented that he doesn't think evangelicals realize how far on the fringe of Christianity that they are.

He also commented on the CCM industry from a "ministry" standpoint. He said that no one knows anyone who really got saved because of a Christian concert, but that they got saved because they knew someone and saw Jesus in their life after this person became their friend and was real with them. He also touched on sin scandals in the CCM industry. He said that it didn't surprise him that these things happen - it surprised him that people are surprised that it happens!

He also said that when people talk about his songs being "inspired by God", that the Scriptures are inspired by God. God gave him a brain and he uses his brain to write songs and since that was what God created it to do, it pleases God. He commented that whatever it is that God created each one of us to do, when we do it, it pleases God. He compared it to listening to the new and upcoming bands earlier that day, and how everyone was dancing & enjoying the music and having fun, and that he thinks God looks down and that and says, "Hey, cool!" He said that he has been accused of having a "humanistic" viewpoint.

He said he finds it odd when people asked him what inspired him to write a particular song, because, whatever the song is about, that's what inspired it. He said if you can't tell what inspired the song, then he can't be a very good songwriter.

He also said he doesn't like it when people say, "that song was really anointed." He thinks they mean they just really liked that song. He said people will call him and tell him that God has called them into the music ministry, and ask him what they should do. He said, "If God's the one that called you, then call God, don't call me!" He said that when people say God called them to do something, it just means they really really want to do it themselves.

Someone else asked what he's reading right now, besides Brennan

Manning. He said, yeah, he likes to read Brennan Manning, and also that he likes to read a German theologian (whose name escapes me right now), but that it's difficult to read because it reads like a German theologian wrote it. He likes to read theology/church history. He mentioned that he'd been studying Roman Catholicism lately, but not that he was plugging Roman Catholicism.

He said what he likes about Roman Catholicism is that when they disciple, they encourage people to be like God, not to be like the one discipling them. IE. "go to the same bible study as me, go to the same church as me, read the same book as me..." He talked about people who try to change him, like telling him not to drink Diet Coke because it's bad for him, and he didn't ask for them to put their nose into his business in the first place.

He said that Alzheimer's runs in his family anyway ... He told how some friends of his were determined that he should speak in tongues, and laid hands on him and told him they wouldn't leave until he did ... so he finally just started saying, "praiseyoujesuspraiseyoujesuspraiseyoujesuspraiseyoujesus..." really, really fast so they'd leave him alone.

He said the church would be a lot better off if everyone knew their church history better and brought what was unique to their denomination to the whole. He then kind of "took roll" of mainline denominations....who here is Presbyterian? Methodist? Baptist? Rich: "Who started the Baptist church anyway? ... No, Ross started it in the U.S., but I think it was someone else before that." Quaker? "What, no Quakers? Oh, there's one! ALRIGHT!"

He said it's important to know what your denomination believes. He told a story about when he was a youth pastor, and a teenager came to him and asked him whether or not drinking was ok. Rich told the teenager to go to the pastor and ask him what the Methodists believe about drinking. The teen came back and said that they don't really have a stance on drinking. Then Rich told the teenager to go home and ask his parents how they feel about it.

He talked about his own beliefs a little, and how he "doesn't believe anything" about some things. He said he was filling out a ministry-type questionnaire that asked what he believes about faith healing, and he said he doesn't believe anything about that topic because he doesn't know. There was another topic he "didn't believe anything about," but I'm not sure

what it was.

He talked about peer pressure, and about a friend who he's had since about seventh grade who got into trouble with alcohol and stuff due to peer pressure. He said that now she's clean from all the alcohol stuff, and she lives like her parents wanted her to in the first place, which is what she had rebelled against as a teen. He commented that she's still being driven by peer pressure because she avoids alcohol, etc., by her involvement with 12-step groups (or some such).

He talked about when you're with people who are drinking alcohol if you don't drink it bothers them and how he can be happy with just cranberry juice. He also made a comment about teetotalers being just as bad (peer pressure) and how he's never met a teetotaler that was any fun.

*He spoke about peer pressure and how young people all think alike, dress alike, listen to the same music, etc., etc. He made a joke about having missed the meeting where everyone decided that goatees were "in". He very firmly spoke to the teens present and told them to remember, when they're tempted by peer pressure, that their parents **love** them and love them more than their friends ever will, and if they don't believe that they should mess themselves and see who cleans them up, their friends or their parents. He also commented that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft ... and since our country began with a rebellion we're all in trouble! Yet we celebrate the 4th of July - while we're all so worried about Halloween!*

He did actually get back to the subject of books. He said he had recently read a book by the author of "The World According to Garp." (Is that Irving? I forget.) He then cautioned anyone who decided to go out and read it not to blame him if they didn't like it. He said someone had asked him to recommend a book that was funny, and he did. They then wrote to him very upset because the book was offensive to them. He said they didn't ask him to recommend a book about morals, because he wouldn't have recommended that one because "it was filthy!" They had asked for a funny book, and it was "the most hilarious thing he had ever read," but that if you don't like to read coming of age/awakening sexuality, not to read that book.

He also said that if all anyone read were books about morals, they must have a very small library. He said that he has to be careful about what he reads because he tends to be cynical. He said he can't watch Monty Python / Holy Grail because if he feeds himself sarcasm he gets very harsh

and sarcastic.

He said that there were 2 children's books he really likes. I don't remember the first one. The second one is "The Rough-faced Girl," which is an Indian folk-tale variation of the basic Cinderella story. He said he thought it was Ojibwa (but I think it's Algonquin). He commented on folk-tales that are roughly the same in all cultures. In this particular version, the rough-faced girl (I believe she was burned, instead of just being dirty with cinders) says that she can see the invisible man, but no one, especially her sisters, believes her. She ends up marrying the invisible man. (I am really not doing this beautiful folk-tale any justice ... Rich did a fine job of telling it.)

He said that he had been approached about writing a book, but when he told them what it would be about, they changed their minds. He said he's always wanted to write a novel about a young man who is a gifted preacher as a young boy, like a prodigy. He gets the opportunity to travel with his idol, a well known and well loved famous preacher who is somewhat unethical. The boy travels with him and gets disillusioned, but continues in the ministry, gets married to someone that he loves dearly, but then she dies. Apparently he is pastoring by this time. The elders (or deacons, I forget which) are concerned about his "marital needs" and refer him to a blind prostitute. He starts to go to her, but can't go through with it, so he marries her. His church is outraged. Then he brings his new wife to a large church picnic, and she recognizes the voices of all the pastors and elders (or deacons) in all the churches in town. They kick him out, and he and his bride go out and live in the boonies, where he eventually finds God in a real and powerful way.

Rich then laughs, throws his arms up and says, "I don't understand ***why*** *they don't want to publish a story like this!"*

He said that he also has tendencies toward depression and has to take people with him when he travels. He said he's fine when he's around people, but after 3 or 4 months on the road, it's difficult for him. He said he gets all hyper after a concert and can't sleep, and then when the night's over, it's easy to get depressed.

He doesn't like to visit churches when he tours because it sometimes takes away from why people are there when they ask him for autographs at a service that he attends. He talked about why people choose their church, and that sometimes it's for the wrong reasons. He said that they had a

bunch of people come to his home church, and when they asked them why they came, it was because of their music program. Rich said, "We told them we didn't want them..." basically because they would move on when they found another music program they liked better. He also told teens not to complain if sometimes church is boring, because sometimes life is boring.

He commented that people also tend to read they same books of the Bible, and that everyone should go to where their Bible isn't underlined, which would probably include Song of Solomon and most of the minor prophets. The first two questions took the majority of the time up because Rich was given the opportunity to touch on so many topics. He was distracted a couple of times by a small boy (about 18 months old) who was wandering around the front and kept trying to go onstage with Rich. Rich just laughed and told the little boy to take advantage of it while he could, because before he knew it, everyone would be telling him what to do and he couldn't get away with stuff like this anymore. He also handed the little boy's mom a chalkboard that was nearby to try to help entertain the boy.

*Somewhere in all this he mentioned that he'd finally graduated from college (and got applause for that) and would be teaching at the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. He said that he'd had to go out there and live for a year before teaching because so many people go out there and they just can't handle living in the desert and they leave after 6 months. They also told him that if he had any demons, he should get rid of them before he went out there. Rich then asked if he'd talked so long that he'd missed the set, then asked who else had questions. No one responded, and he said, "You mean I've answered **all** your questions?"*

Someone asked what kind of guitar strings Rich recommends. Rich said that he's a guitar "owner" not a guitar "player." He suggested that the guy start with a medium gage and work his way down to the finest gage that he's comfortable with. Someone asked what Rich thinks of Promise Keepers. Rich said, "It's about time!" He admitted to never having been to any Promise Keeper events, but he said the church needs strong men. He said he doesn't have anything against strong women because his mother & grandmother were strong women and they were very influential in his spiritual life. But that the church needs men's presence and participation.

Someone said he'd read that Rich has recorded on quote-unquote-secular releases under the name of "Moon Mullins." Rich laughed and said he

reads a lot of things about himself. He said he has a brother that they call Moon Mullins. He never did give either a yes or no answer to this question.

Someone asked what is his favorite song he's written. He said "Elijah..." then looked like he was about to elaborate, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "just because."

Someone asked about Rich's classes in college, and if he found theory classes boring. Rich said, no, that actually he really gets into theory.

Someone in the back asked him a question that had to do with being called into the music ministry, and Rich just looked at him in shock and said, "Uh... did you come in late or something?"

Someone asked, "For all the single women here, do you think you'll ever get married?" He laughed, and said, "I'm having so much fun single that I can't imagine having more fun being married, and by the time I'm ready to be married I'll probably be too old to be of any use to anyone." (He had commented several times earlier "in my 40 years", "in the 40 years I've been alive.")

*Someone asked what Rich thinks/how he feels when he hears himself on the radio. Rich said he rarely hears himself because he doesn't like to listen to music when he drives. I'm not sure, but I **think** he might have said something about preferring to listen to other things, but I'm not sure what he meant (talk radio? preaching?) He did comment that words are ideas, and that in the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh, and we turn around and make it the (W/w)ord again ... I'm not sure if he meant that this was a good or a bad thing... He then, said, "But yeah, every once in a while I catch one of my songs and the radio and, yeah, it's kind of a blast."*

*I then raised my hand and asked Rich what musical artist he **does** listen to. I got flustered and stuttered, so he had to repeat my question back to me. He said he likes Bach, Mozart, some hammered dulcimer player whose name meant nothing to me. "...and the Chieftains." He said he likes Celtic music, too.*

*All in all, he shared a **lot** of information in about an hour and a half.*

His attitude was a little rough. IMHO, somebody must have set him off right

before he came in to speak with us. I have to admit that some people went away offended by what seemed to them anger and bitterness.

He had a very dry and biting sense of humor which a lot of people either missed or didn't appreciate. I was never sure when he was being serious, when he was daring us to take him seriously, or when he was just being flat-out ornery. There were times when I found him just hysterical, but no one else was laughing. (I'm not sure what that says about me...) It was almost like he walked into the place with the intent just to stir us up a little and prove to us that we have no idea who the real-life Rich Mullins is.

I know someone already spoke about the concert, but there were a couple of things I'd like to comment on. First of all, he came out while the comedian was leading a round of "Hallelu-hallelu-hallelu-hallelujah-Praise Ye the Lord." Rich walked up (sans sweater ... just the tan t-shirt, which read "shoeless"), took the microphone and said, "I know you were supposed to introduce me and everything, but ... here I am ... so ... Hi."

Rich took over and did the "Trinitarian" version of the song (in 3 parts). He also made us do all the standing up and sitting down like we did as kids.

It was cool and chilly during the set, and the clouds began to get thick and dark while Rich and his pal Mitch McVicker sang Dougie McClellan's "Ready for the Storm." It was a pretty cool effect. All in all, the set was much too short! He did comment on Beaker's absence, saying that he usually doesn't have people travel with him if they have families, unless their kids are older and stuff. He said that Beaker is doing "the Hebrew thing" (see Deuteronomy 24:5).

*After the concert Rich signed autographs in Agape's "Fan Tent." The line was very long and the mud was very deep. I got up to him and had all the inserts from my cassette tapes, and he looked at what I had, laughed, and said, "Wow, you've got a lot!" I told him he didn't have to sign all of them if he didn't want to... Rich said, "Well, the line **is** pretty long." My friend Brenda was with me. She grabbed one of them from me for him to sign for her, so I could have 2 autographs. I grabbed it back from her, and said, "No, not **that** one, **THIS** one!" Rich laughed at my obvious compulsiveness and said, "I like that!" I told him that I had had them in order (of my favorites, not release date). My friend Brenda then made me go behind the table and stand by Rich to get my picture taken with him. She twisted my arm and **made** me do it ... I swear she did! :) Rich leaned up against me*

and grinned really big, and Brenda took a very lopsided picture of me and Rich. Brenda shook his hand and said, "God bless you!" and I managed to stutter out a "Thank you."

Rich was in much better spirits during the concert, and was extremely patient and kind and personable during the very very long line for autographs. He looked a little tired, but kept a very genuine smile on his face the entire time. Brenda and I left while Rich continued to sign autographs and speak with fans...

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